

Fund raising for law enforcement and fire fighter groups

Most citizens hold law enforcement and public safety personnel in high regard, and are willing to do what they can to support them. This sense of loyalty may lead you to agree to donate to groups which align themselves with causes related to police or fire fighters. After all, most of us would like to remain on the “good side” of these local agencies.

Solicitations, calls, and mailings from groups claiming to have an affiliation with police or fire fighters should be looked at carefully. These solicitations may have very little to do with local police or fire organizations.

Professional fund raisers

Most calls for police and fire fighter groups are not made

by local officers, even though this is what you may assume or be led to believe. Solicitors are usually professional fund raisers, who may or may not be calling on behalf of a local agency. Recently, people in Wisconsin have reported contacts from several state police or fire association labor unions. When a labor union collects money, it is divided between the professional fund raiser and the labor union, not the local department, which is already funded by tax dollars.

Even if a group claims to be affiliated with a local organization, this does not necessarily indicate that much of the money will benefit the local agency. Other groups are for-profit companies which adopt a name that sounds as if it is associated with police or fire fighters, but none of the funds go to any such groups

or causes. This can happen with companies that publish law enforcement journals and call businesses asking them to buy advertising space. Some companies send invoices for advertising, even though the business did not agree to place an ad.

In January 1995, the Attorney General's Office filed an action against a Texas company that published Trooper Recovery Journal. The state charged the company, PMI Corporation, Houston, Texas, with trying to force Wisconsin businesses to pay for unordered advertisements in the publication. In a consent judgment, the company agreed to pay a civil forfeiture for violations of the state's false advertising law and stop soliciting in Wisconsin for the next five years. The Trooper Recovery Journal has no affiliation

whatsoever with any law enforcement organization.

How much do they get?

Another important fact you should know before making a decision to donate, buy a ticket, or pay for advertising is to find out what percentage of the money collected actually goes to the group. A professional fund raiser can, and often does, legally keep 75 percent or more of the money collected. This means that a law enforcement group can end up with as little as 10 or less percent of the donated funds. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that it is illegal to regulate the portion of contributions a fund raiser may take, due to the sometimes high costs of a campaign. Unfortunately, this means that local police or fire organizations can become victims along with individual consumers or businesses which give money to professional fund raisers.

Since professional fund raisers typically raise more money than a law enforcement group can raise on its own, some local agencies do enter into contracts with professional

fund raisers in order to be guaranteed a certain amount of money. The organization may settle for 10 percent of the money the fund raiser actually collects. You may think it is quite an accomplishment when \$56,000 is raised for your local police or fire organization, but may become disgruntled to find that \$560,000 was actually collected from people in your community.

Check your investment

In deciding whether to support a fund raiser who calls on behalf of a law enforcement or public safety agency, ask the following questions:

- Where is the organization located?
- Is the caller being paid or calling as a volunteer?
- How much of your donation will actually go to the local organization?
- What will the organization do with the money?

When asked these questions, watch for any hesitation or uncertainty in the caller. Be suspicious if the caller is unable or unwilling to provide this basic information.

Is it registered?

All charities not exempted by law which are soliciting in Wisconsin must be registered with the state Department of Regulation and Licensing. Charities that comply with Wisconsin's charitable solicitations law must disclose the true name of the charity, its actual location, and primary purpose. You can call 608/266-5511 to verify if the charity is registered.

Additional information about charities can also be obtained through the Better Business Bureau's Philanthropic Advisory Service (800-273-1002) and the National Charities Information Bureau (212-929-6300). For more information about complaints filed against specific organizations, or to file a complaint, contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection at:

(800) 422-7128

FAX: (608) 224-4939

TTY: (608) 224-5058

E-MAIL:
datcph hotline@datcp.state.wi.us

WEBSITE:
<http://datcp.state.wi.us/>